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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000190

STATE FOR NEA/ELA - LAWSON, NEA/ELA - IRWIN, NEA/PPD, R,  
INR/R/MR, INR-PARENT,  
NSC - MCDERMOTT, SHAPIRO

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREF](#) [PREL](#) [KMDR](#) [OPRC](#) [KPAO](#) [KISL](#) [KPAL](#) [LE](#)  
SUBJECT: Lebanon: Power Struggle Over LBCI

11. (U) Summary: Long standing problems between the Chairman of the Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation International (LBCI), Pierre El Daher, and the Lebanese Forces Party escalated over the last two weeks. The result was that CEO Pierre El Daher blamed Lebanese security forces of failing to carry out their duties and announced that the station was under "armed occupation." LBCI was created following the implementation of the 1994 media law. Lebanese Broadcasting Corporation (LBC) was registered as LBCI. LBCI is the leading broadcast channel. The public continues to refer to it as LBC. End Summary.

El Daher Reacts  
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12. (U) On Saturday January 31, 2009, one of LBCI's main studios was sabotaged when cameras were filled with fire extinguishing powder. The sabotaged studio is the location of one of LBCI's highly rated shows -- "Ahmar Bilkhat El Arid (In Bold Red)." A source told Public Diplomacy that the instigators were trying to sabotage one of the most profitable shows to spite El Daher.

13. (U) LBCI released a statement accusing the company's security, known to be loyal to the Lebanese Forces, of carrying out the sabotage. The statement accused "a former dismissed employee who reports to the former (also dismissed senior) security officer Charbel Abi Akl." (Note: A year ago, El Daher dismissed pro-Lebanese Forces security employee, Charbel Abi Aql and sixteen others who reported to him. According to El Daher, Abi Aql refused to leave the position and continues to report to duty despite a court ruling that forbids him from entering the premises. Conversely, Abi Aql argues that both he and El Daher were hired by the Lebanese Forces and that only it is entitled to fire him. End Note.)

14. (U) El Daher issued a statement on Monday, February 9, 2009, saying the station was under "armed occupation." He stated that Abi Aql and sixteen other security personnel were no longer on LBCI's payroll and he argued that they were paid by the leadership of the Lebanese Forces. El Daher announced that LBCI's problem was no longer with the "outlaws," i.e., the seventeen dismissed employees including Abi Aql, but with the people who are supposed to enforce the law, specifically the Minister of Interior, Ziad Baroud, and his predecessor Hassan Sabaa. The court order was issued during Sabaa's term in office. In his announcement, El Daher openly challenged the security services by saying, "the failure to implement a single decision in one Lebanese area raises questions about the ability to hold the elections not in one region only, but throughout Lebanon and in one day."

Lebanese Forces Responds  
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15. (U) Lebanese Forces responded by saying that it is awaiting the court verdict to determine who owns LBCI/LBC. Lebanese Forces maintains that it chose "the legal and judicial path" in dealing with El Daher and alleges that he breached his management responsibility of LBC. (Note: Lebanese Forces established terrestrial channel LBC between 1982-5, with funding from the party.

During Geagea's eleven years of incarceration, fellow director, Pierre El Daher, created affiliate LBCI and the LBC satellite station (LBCsat). El Daher turned LBCI/LBC into one of the most profitable media outlets in the region. However, Lebanese Forces claims that the company belongs to it and have fought to regain control since Geagea's release from prison in 2005. The case is in court awaiting the final verdict. End Note.)

#### Pro-Lebanese Forces Anchor Resigns

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16. (U) One week before El Daher's press statement, one of LBCI's most prominent anchors, May Chidiac, announced her resignation on air. (Note: Chidiac, a staunch Lebanese Forces and March 14 supporter, was the target of an assassination attempt September 25, 2005 in which she lost a hand and a leg. End Note.) She told Public Diplomacy that she had become "a punching bag" for El Daher in his case against the Lebanese Forces. She said that she had had enough of El Daher's attitude toward her. El Daher accused Chidiac of being biased and of hosting people from "one color only," i.e. March 14 supporters. She countered that this was not the case and alleged that there was "a Syrian decision" that forbade members of March 8 from appearing on her show because she was a symbol of March 14.

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17. (U) In her emotional resignation, Chidiac thanked El Daher for "appreciating her work and the high ratings she brought," but spoke about "colleagues inside LBC who waged a fierce war against" her. She told them "I decide when to leave; you do not decide when I should leave... I decided to stop today because I have my dignity." She added that she could "no longer betray the blood she lost, no longer betray her convictions. I could no longer lower my standards and dignity to get the approval of someone who is below standard..." She ended with "Sheikh Pierre I love you. I have only one wish, which is that Samir Geagea and Pierre Daher agree. I paid the high price of blood."

#### COMMENT

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18. (U) Since Geagea's arrest in 1994, El Daher worked hard to adopt a policy of moderation to preserve the company which was considered a Lebanese Forces institution. El Daher's efforts turned the company into a huge success making it a major platform for politicians from across the political spectrum in Lebanon. In the statement he issued, El Daher maintained that LBC's "message aims at a free and balanced media that is based on granting all citizens and public office workers the media space they deserve within the formula of no hushing and no exaggeration; objectivity rules its policy..." However, until a verdict is reached on the legal case between El Daher and the Lebanese Forces, and in the reaming four months between the June 7 parliamentary elections, it is not clear whether El Daher will give equal airtime to the March 14 and the March 8 positions.

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